

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 8, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
The U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We are writing to oppose the disastrous rule to revise the use of broad-based categorical eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which will make it harder for millions of families to get the nutrition assistance they need. If enacted, the Trump Administration's own analysis of this rule estimates that 3.1 million people — nearly nine percent of SNAP recipients — would lose their benefits. No one should go hungry in the United States of America.

This plan would disproportionately punish working families who are already struggling to put food on the table and make ends meet. Today, more than 13 million American children live in poverty, more than one in five people experiencing homelessness are children, and the United States has the highest youth poverty rate and infant mortality rate among comparable nations. Currently, 84 percent of SNAP benefits go to households with children, seniors, or a person with a disability, and 50 percent of children will receive SNAP at some point in their childhoods.¹

Families with children are more likely to face food insecurity, and in 2017, the number of families facing food insecurity rose for the first time since the Great Recession.² Access to SNAP has been shown to improve health and educational outcomes for school children.³ Additionally, schools rely on SNAP enrollment when determining eligibility for free school meals, so households could be penalized twice: once with the loss of household SNAP benefits and again with the loss of free school meals for children. In fact, USDA estimates 500,000 children will lose their automatic eligibility for free school meals.⁴

¹ Food Research & Action Center, "SNAP Benefits Need to Be Made Adequate, Not Cut Or Restricted" (February 2018). Online at: <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/snap-food-choice.pdf>.

² Food Research & Action Center, "Food Hardship in America: A Look at National, Regional, State, and Metropolitan Statistical Area Data on Household Struggles With Hunger" (August 2018). Online at: <https://www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/food-hardship-july-2018.pdf>.

³ Steven Carlson and Brynne Keith-Jennings, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "SNAP Is Linked with Improved Nutritional Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs" (January 17, 2018). Online at: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-nutritional-outcomes-and-lower-health-care>. ; Edward A. Frongillo, Diana F. Jyoti, and Sonya J. Jones, The Journal of Nutrition, "Food Stamp Program Participation Is Associated with Better Academic Learning among School Children" (April 2006). Online at: <https://academic.oup.com/jn/article/136/4/1077/4664206>.

⁴ Laura Camera, U.S. News, "500,000 Poor Kids Could Lose Eligibility for Free School Lunch" (July 29, 2019). Online at: <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2019-07-29/democrats-white-house-buries-impact-of-food-stamp-eligibility-changes>

A recent study from the Urban Institute found that the average cost of a low-income meal was 27 percent higher than the maximum benefit.⁵ In order to cover the cost of food, USDA would need to increase the average benefit by about \$46.50 per person per month⁶. In addition, the USDA's estimate of how much low-income families should spend on food relies on unrealistic assumptions of food access and the amount of time low-income families have available to prepare meals.⁷

Moreover, families must already go through a robust vetting process to verify income eligibility. USDA's assertion that families can simply receive an informational brochure in order to qualify for SNAP is simply not true.⁸ Perpetuating this lie breeds distrust in a successful program that lifted 8.4 million people out of poverty in 2015.⁹ USDA also erroneously asserts that higher income individuals take advantage of SNAP benefits. In reality, fraud is virtually nonexistent in this program; just 0.2 percent of benefits mistakenly go to households with net incomes above the poverty line.¹⁰ Further, there are many more people who qualify for SNAP that are not enrolled in the program.¹¹ USDA's resources would be better spent focusing on increasing participation among all who are eligible, rather than trying to limit participation among people who are already struggling.

In a nation where the three wealthiest people own more wealth than the bottom half, increasing the barriers for hungry families is unconscionable. Last year, the United Nations report by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights noted that "in a rich country like the United States, the persistence of extreme poverty is a political choice made by those in power."¹² With this proposal you are once again doubling down on that choice.

⁵ Elaine Waxman, Craig Gundersen, and Megan Thompson, Urban Institute, "How Far Do SNAP Benefits Fall Short of Covering the Cost of a Meal?" (February 2018). Online at: https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/96661/how_far_do_snap_benefits_fall_short_of_covering_the_cost_of_a_meal_4.pdf.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Food Research & Action Center, "SNAP Benefits Need to Be Made Adequate, Not Cut Or Restricted" (February 2018). Online at: <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/snap-food-choice.pdf>.

⁸ United States Department of Agriculture, "Regulatory Reform at a Glance Proposed Rule: Revision of SNAP Categorical Eligibility" (July 23, 2019). Online at: https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/BBCE_Fact_Sheet_%28FINAL%29_72219-PR.pdf.

⁹ Arloc Sherman, Center on budget and Policy Priorities, "Census: Programs Eyed for Cuts Keep Millions from Poverty" (September 12, 2018). Online at: <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/census-programs-eyed-for-cuts-keep-millions-from-poverty>.

¹⁰ Robert Greenstein, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Misguided Trump Administration Rule Would Take Basic Food Assistance From Working Families, Seniors, and People With Disabilities" (July 23, 2019). Online at: <https://www.cbpp.org/press/statements/misguided-trump-administration-rule-would-take-basic-food-assistance-from-working>.

¹¹ United States Department of Agriculture, "Reaching Those in Need: Estimates of State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2016 – Summary" (March 2019). Online at: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/Reaching2016-Summary.pdf>.

¹² United Nations General Assembly, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights on his mission to the United States of America" (May 4, 2018). Online at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/125/30/PDF/G1812530.pdf?OpenElement>

Millions of families will go hungry if your administration moves forward with this policy. We urge you to immediately rescind this shortsighted proposal. Thank you for your careful consideration of our comments.

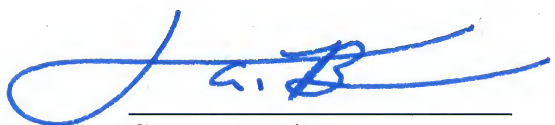
Sincerely,




Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



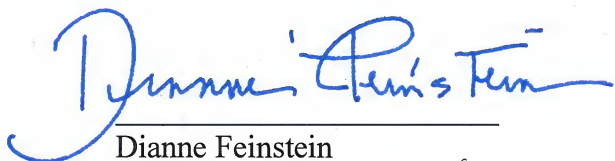
Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



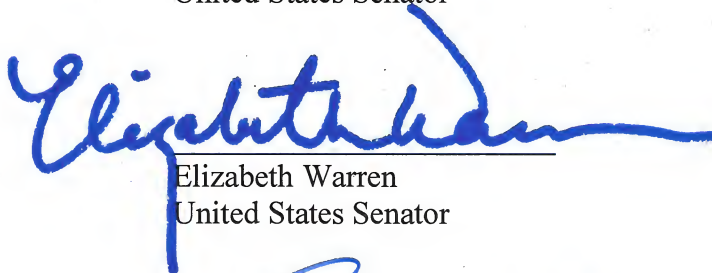
Tom Udall
United States Senator



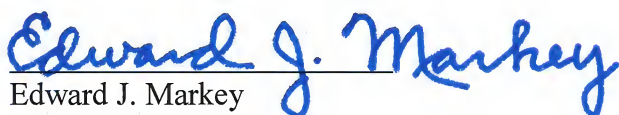
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



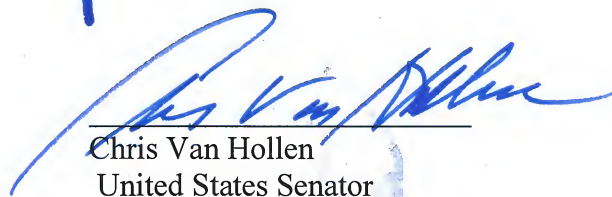
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



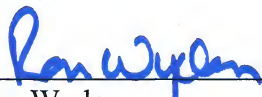
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



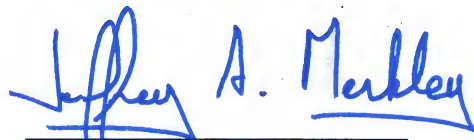
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



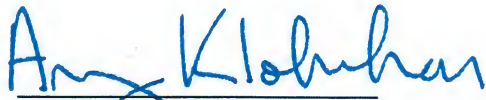
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



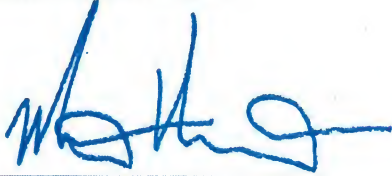
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



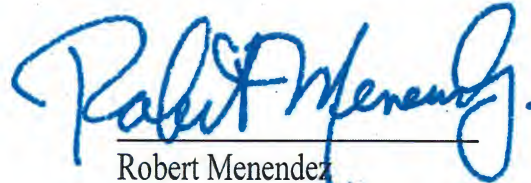
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



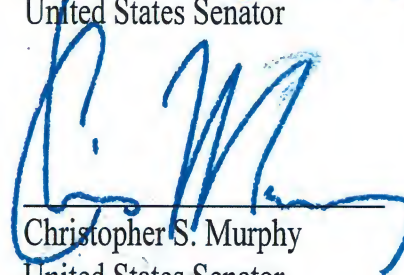
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



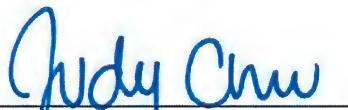
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



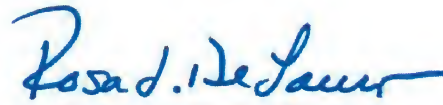
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



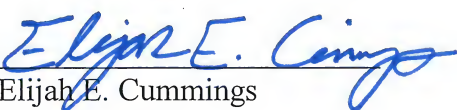
Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress



Gwen Moore
Member of Congress



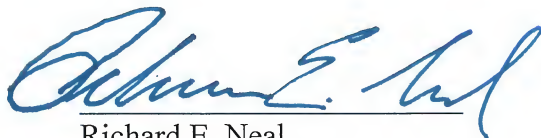
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress



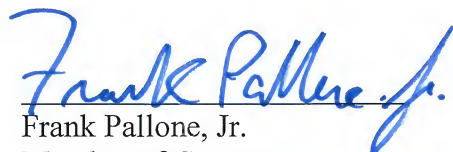
Steven Horsford
Member of Congress



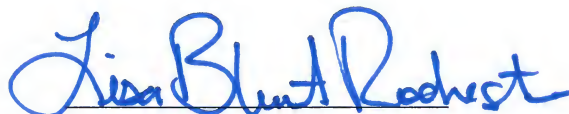
Richard E. Neal
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Zoe Lofgren
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Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress



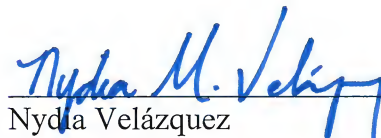
Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



Ben Ray Luján
Member of Congress



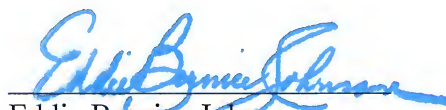
Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



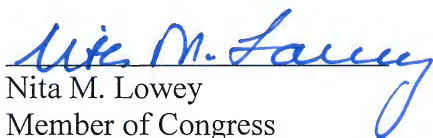
Nydia Velázquez
Member of Congress



Marcia L. Fudge
Member of Congress




Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress



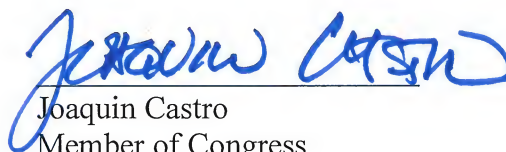
Nita M. Lowey
Member of Congress



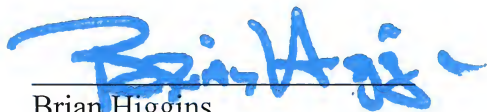
Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress



G. K. Butterfield
Member of Congress



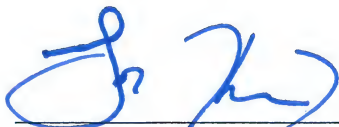
Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



Brian Higgins
Member of Congress



C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress



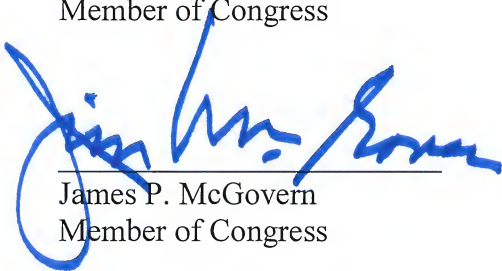
Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress



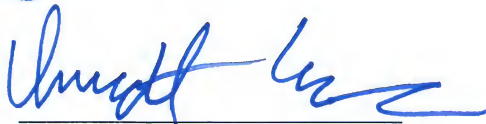
Karen Bass
Member of Congress



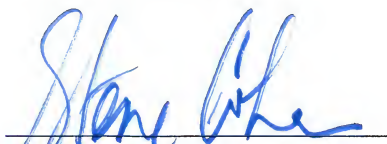
Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



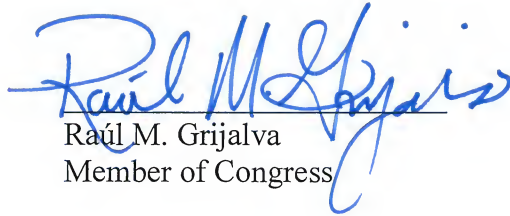
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



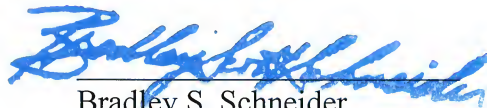
Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



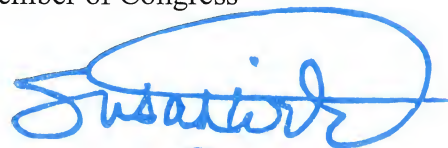
Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



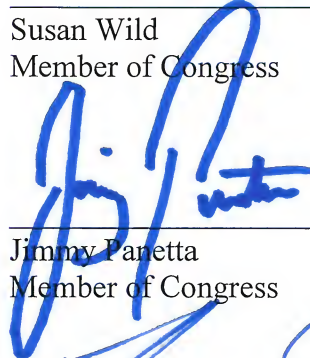
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



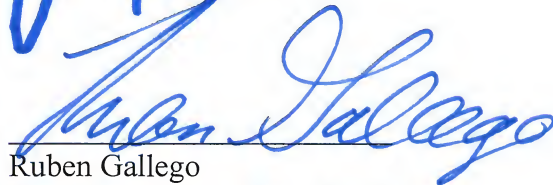
Bradley S. Schneider
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Susan Wild
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Jimmy Panetta
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Ruben Gallego
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Katie Hill
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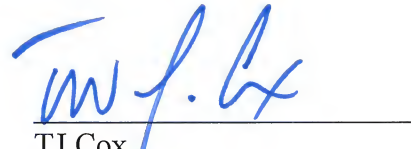


Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

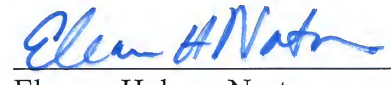



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

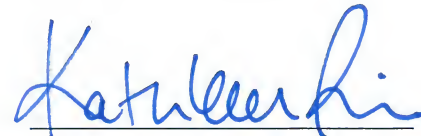

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
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TJ Cox
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Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

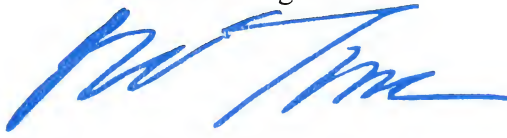

Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Kathleen M. Rice
Member of Congress

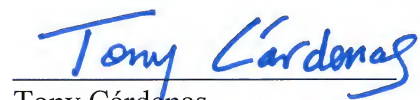

Bill Foster
Member of Congress

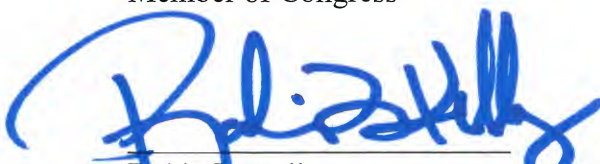

Jefferson Van Drew
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David Trone
Member of Congress

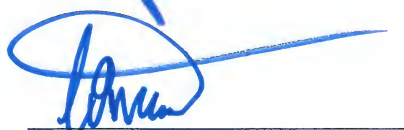

Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress

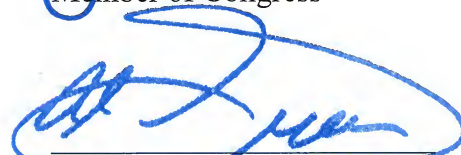

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

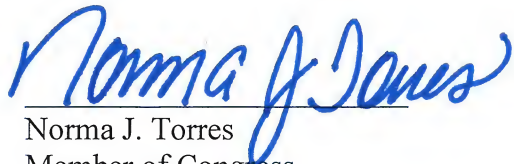

Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress


Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress

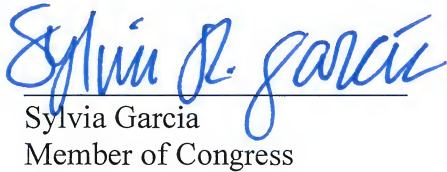

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress


Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress


Al Green
Member of Congress



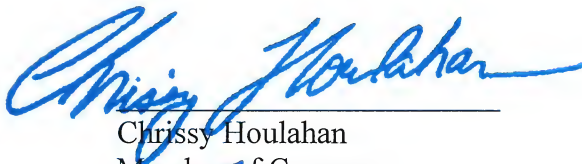
Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress



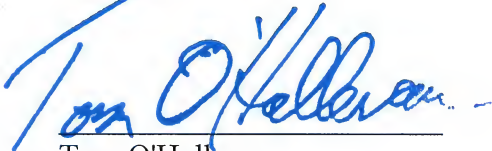
Sylvia Garcia
Member of Congress



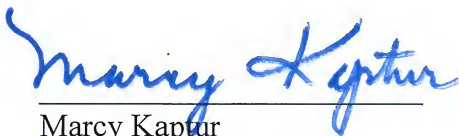
Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress



Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress



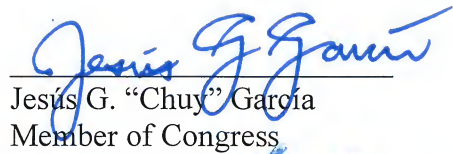
Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Scott H. Peters
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



Joe Courtney
Member of Congress



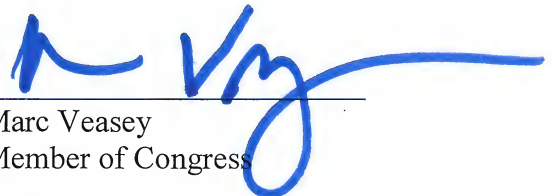
Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



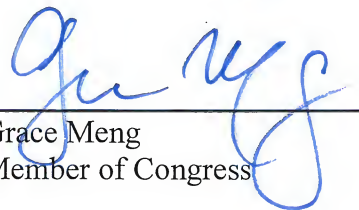
José E. Serrano
Member of Congress



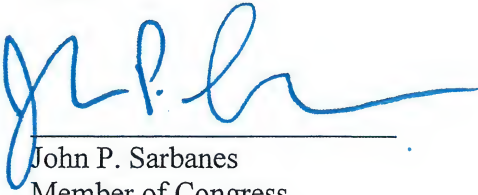
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



Marc Veasey
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



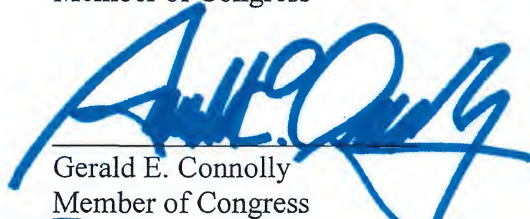
John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress



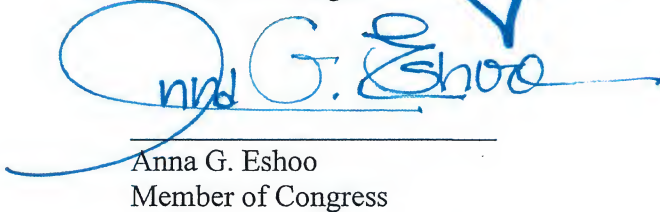
Mike Doyle
Member of Congress



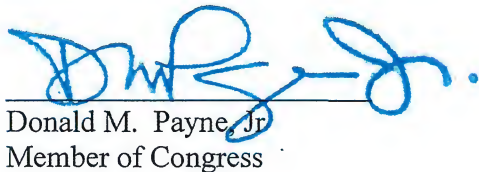
Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress



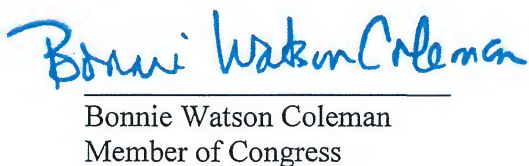
Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



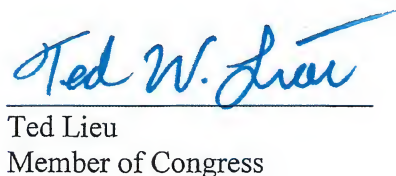
Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



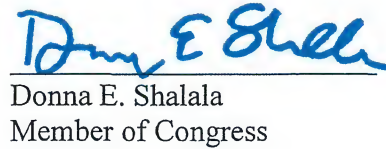
Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress



Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress



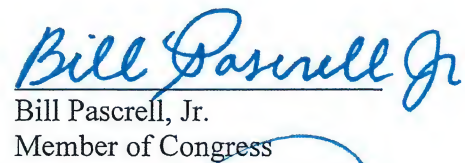
Ted Lieu
Member of Congress



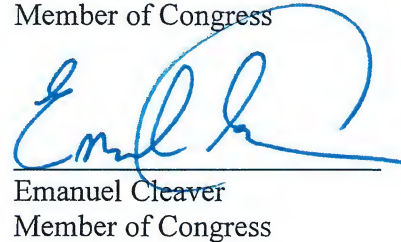
Donna E. Shalala
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



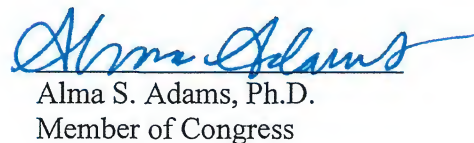
Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress



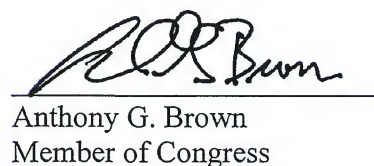
Emanuel Cleaver
Member of Congress



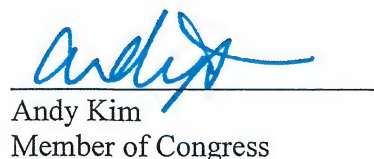
Tim Ryan
Member of Congress



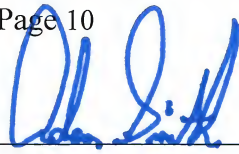
Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress



Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress



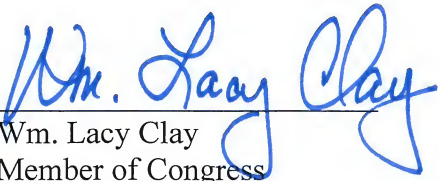
Andy Kim
Member of Congress



Adam Smith
Member of Congress



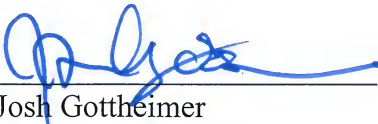
Filemon Vela
Member of Congress



Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress



J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress



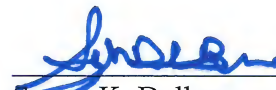
Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress



Jim Cooper
Member of Congress



Angie Craig
Member of Congress



Suzan K. Delbene
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



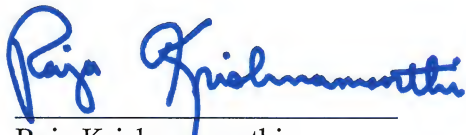
Lori Trahan
Member of Congress



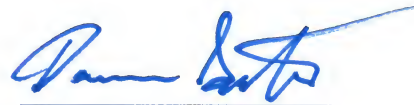
Max Rose
Member of Congress



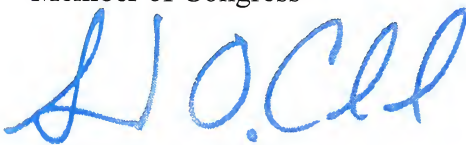
Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



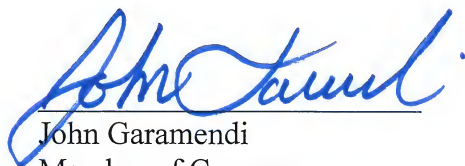
Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



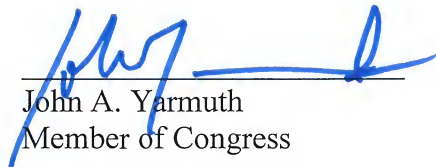
Salud O. Carbajal
Member of Congress



John Garamendi
Member of Congress



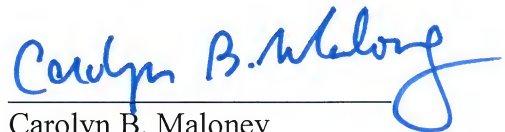
Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress



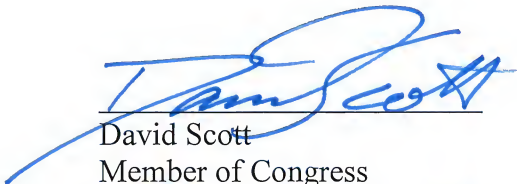
John A. Yarmuth
Member of Congress



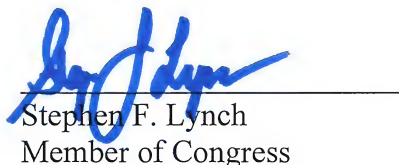
David E. Price
Member of Congress



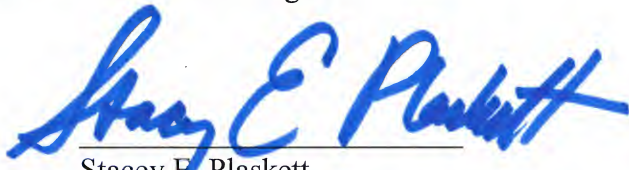
Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress



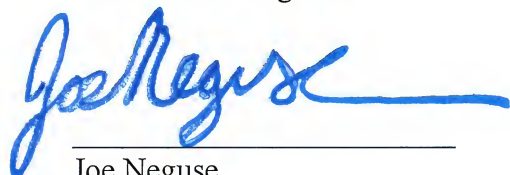
David Scott
Member of Congress



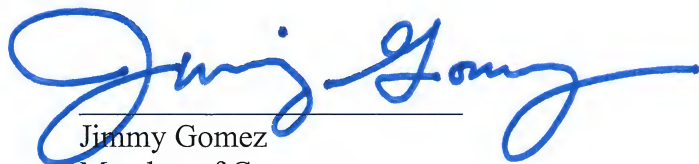
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Stacey E. Plaskett
Member of Congress



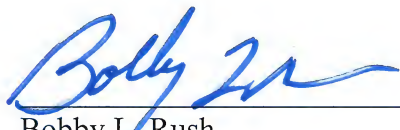
Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



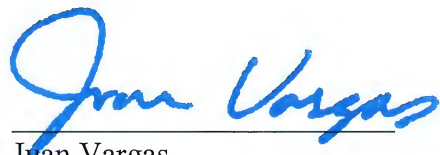
Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress



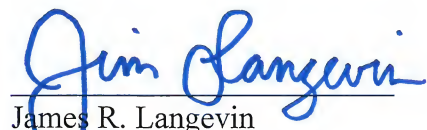
Sean Patrick Maloney
Member of Congress



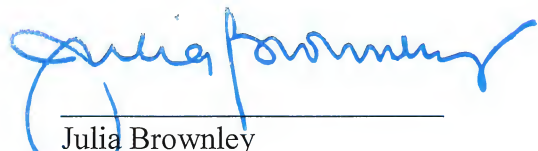
Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress



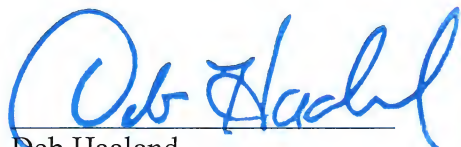
Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



James R. Langevin
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



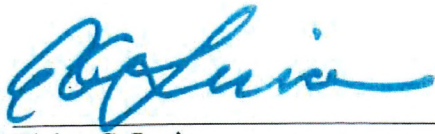
Deb Haaland
Member of Congress



A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress

The Honorable Sonny Perdue

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elaine G. Luria", is positioned above a horizontal line.

Elaine G. Luria
Member of Congress